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U.S. Blamed in Rise of Japanese Gangs

The infiltration of Japanese gangsters into the United States is a story we've been reporting for two years. Their success in terrorizing Japanese tourists and the Japanese-American community is causing increased concern among law-enforcement authorities.

Two veteran reporters associated with the Center for Investigative Reporting, David Kaplan and Alec Dubro, have now written a book describing in ominous detail the origins and growth of the Japanese criminal gangs—and the serious threat they pose to our society. The book is titled "Yakuza," the name given to the underworld gangs from the simple card game they played to while away the hours between missions of murder, extortion and other crimes.

Our associate Donald Goldberg has reviewed an advance copy of the book, which is based on the largest file on Yakuza in this country. Here are some revelations of particular concern to Americans:

- After Japan's crushing defeat in World War II, the Yakuza gangs were in almost total disarray. One development that helped them survive was recruitment of gang members by U.S. intelligence officers. The American authorities used Yakuza members to spy on and disrupt the supposedly leftist labor movement in Japan.

Several incidents traced to Yakuza thugs in the pay of the U.S. government were aimed at union members in Japan in the late 1940s and 1950s. In one case, saboteurs derailed a Japanese National Railways train, killing three people and injuring scores. Twenty railway workers were convicted of

the crime, despite evidence that their prosecution was a setup. They were finally exonerated in 1963.

- Yakuza gangsters working for the CIA kidnaped a well-known leftist writer, who was held by the agency for more than a year. Other intimidations of this sort are also described in the book.

- Congress is indirectly responsible for the arming of the Japanese underworld, by virtue of its relaxed gun-control legislation. Until recently, Japan's strict gun controls had made the country virtually free of handguns and extremely low in the incidence of shooting fatalities.

Recently, however, a multimillion-dollar gun trade between the United States and Japan has opened up, with thousands of American pistols flooding into Japan. The Yakuza are understandably in the vanguard of this lethal, lucrative and illegal trade. Handguns that cost \$100 in this country fetch as much as \$2,000 in Tokyo. The well-armed Yakuza gangs have been indulging in some of the bloodiest battles of their long history. Japanese Yakuza leaders told the authors they can no longer control their gang members.

- Roughly half the Yakuza's enormous illicit income is derived from drugs, with methamphetamines, or "speed," the drug of choice.

Kaplan and Dubro conclude that the United States must shoulder a large share of blame for the resurrection of the Yakuza. The main responsibility rests on shortsighted U.S. officials, who—like their colleagues in postwar Germany—fancied they could use the worst elements of the occupied nations' society to bring stability and to combat communism.